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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic characteristics of settled-out Mexican American migrant farmworkers who were in the South Texas-based midwestern migrant stream were examined. By chain identification (each family identified 1 or 2 others), 27 subjects were located. These ex-migrants had, over the years, settled-out in and around a small city (population 40,000) in east central Wisconsin. Generally, they settled-out to enter wage work with little risk-reducing aid. These settled-out families had: a smaller number of children; greater facility in English; more formal education, including more high school graduates; substantially greater income without the child labor; and the willingness to sever supporting ties of kinship and friendship with other Chicanos. Since these characteristics suggested some rather Anglicized Chicanos, 11 Chicano adolescents were interviewed to determine whether: submergence of ethnicity was necessary for comfortable adaptation to an Anglo sociocultural context, or any anti-Mexican prejudice was encountered in the community. Some generalizations which emerged were: the adolescents expressed little feeling of pride in, or knowledge of, La Raza or of Mexicanness, although one or both parents had been born in Mexico in 80% of the cases; Cesar Chavez was just a public figure to most of them; and they seemed to be aware of discrimination on a very low and subtle level, but attributed it to the individual's idiosyncracies, rather than a group trait of Anglos. (NQ)

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SETTLING OUT AND SETTLING IN

by

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SETTLING OUT AND SETTLING IN

Migratory farm laborers are a group who have attracted a considerable amount of attention from numerous groups in the United States. There are journalists who describe the "plight" of the farm workers in terms of a "harvest of shame"; there are private, often religious-affiliated, groups which collect clothes, money and in other ways minister to migrants as acts of charity and concern. There are also groups that represent migrant farm worker employers who seek to avoid having the "do-gooders" stimulate the passage of legislation to protect the farm workers. The latter groups also seek to right the view many in the general populace seem to have of employers of migrant farm workers as heartless exploiters.

In a rather different category are numerous government agencies at all levels from Federal to state and local which concern themselves with different aspects of migrants' lives. Such aspects include investigating the quality of housing, coordinating work availability information, investigation of conformance of wages to legislated minima, inspection of facilities relevant to health issues (e.g., toxic pesticide exposure), the raising of skill levels, the education of adult migrants and their children, and so on.

All these services, however, have not affected the fact that the demand for migrant farm labor in the fields and in canneries has, with some periodic fluctuations, steadily reduced in recent years. A combination of grower and cannery mechanization, reduced cost-input savings as wages rise, and increased worker demand for more regular and remunerative employment all act together to cause a general outflow of migrant farm workers from the migrant streams (e.g. Provinzano 1971 : 119 - 20). There is concern expressed by a number of

different agencies at different exit points on each of the three main migrant streams (East Coast, Midwest, West Coast) about what to do to make the exit smoother. Particularly certain government agencies (esp. United Migrant Opportunity Service or UMOS) have found themselves involved in aiding in the exit (or "settling out") process. In some cases, given their legislated missions, said involvement is unexpected. Agencies set up to minister to migrants end up aiding them in the process of becoming ex-migrants.

There are two groups of migrant farm workers who appear to compose the majority of those who settle-out. The first group is composed of workers of lower-than-average skill levels who have not developed patron-client relationships with growers, canning company agents or crew chiefs which would permit the maintenance of job continuity year after year as demand for farm labor declines (Provinzano 1971 : 21-2). Such individuals generally settle out involuntarily (i.e., they cannot find work), frequently settling into the ghetto of a central city. Individuals in this group face little prospect of finding work substantially more remunerative than farm work, which has the lowest pay level of any job category in the United States.* This group, which concerns agencies such as UMOS greatly, will not concern us further in this paper.

The second group of migrant farm workers who settle out, in contrast to the first, tend to settle out voluntarily because they feel they have prospects which are brighter than remaining in farm work would be. Individuals in this group tend to have sufficient confidence in themselves, their skills and abilities to leave behind the familiar and enter new and frequently alien

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* See Note Page 9

territory. This is especially the case when they settle out far from their migrant stream base of operations (esp. for the midwest stream focused upon in this paper, far from Texas) and among people ethnically different from themselves. If we were to add that, furthermore, as in the data presented below, these individuals settle into communities of small, dispersed type, that the individuals are so scattered and few in number that they do not make up an identifiable ethnic community and the challenge and risk involved in this settling out process becomes clear. The challenge of identifying them for research purposes should be clear as well.

The individuals to whom particular reference is made in this paper are Chicano (Mexican-American) former farm workers who originally were in the South Texas-based Midwestern migrant stream. They have, over the years, settled-out of that stream in and around a small city (population: approximately 40,000) in east central Wisconsin which we shall call "Ashocan". The research upon which the foregoing data and analysis are based was done by the author and four student colleagues mainly between summer, 1971, and summer, 1972.

The first problem was locating them. As a dispersed non-group, social agencies were little help to us. We found that "Chicano ex-migrants" was more an analytical and less a folk category than we had believed possible. Finally we located them by chain identification. That is, each family knew about one or two others until we had located 27.

A few of the migrants who settled-out did so at great obvious advantage to themselves and with very little risk. One individual, for example, bought a good working farm on the outskirts of town with the money to pay for it lent, interest free, by a former employer, a local grower-patron. Such a situation is most unusual. Generally those who settled out did so to enter wage work with little risk-reducing aid.

In interviews and other contacts, as the researchers came to know the ex-migrants and to comprehend their adaptations, a notion of the general parameters of those who voluntarily settle-out, as compared to those migrants who do not settle out, began to emerge. Some of these are quantifiable or are expressible in mutually exclusive categories. The Table below is a compilation of those parameters:

TABLE I

SETTLED-OUT MIGRANTS COMPARED WITH NON-SETTLED-OUT MIGRANTS (SAME LOCALITY) AND, SELECTIVELY, WITH ALL ASHOCAN RESIDENTS, 1971.

	Settled-Out Group	Non-Settled-Out Group	Random Sample of Ashocan, *Area All Ashocan
No. of families	27	58	25
No. individuals (adults and children)	120	435	92
Mean Nuclear Family Size	4.4	7.5	3.7
% adults bilingual (Engl./Span.)	100%	58%	100
% migrated to Ashocan in parental generation	97%	--	6%
Mean length of residence in Ashocan	16 yrs.	--	22 all their lives
Mean years schooling (adults)	8.1 yrs.	4.8 yrs	10.4 yrs.*
% high school grads	35%	8.8% (10 of 114)	44.2%*
% male work force who are laborers (non-craft construction & general)	50%	--	4% *
Mean yearly family income	$6,040.00	$2,631.00	$7,837.00 *
Income range	unemployed to $12,500.	unemployed to $6,100.	unemployed to $50,000. +

*Source - Wisconsin Statistical Reporting Service and U. S. Census Bureau, Regional Census Data.

Examination of the accompanying Table is instructive for comprehending this voluntary settling-out phenomenon. Those who settle-out have fewer children than the sample of continuing migrants (5.5 as opposed to 2.4). All settled-out adults are bilingual as opposed to just over half of continuing migrants (this was tested by the investigators trying to communicate with individuals in English). Even among bilingual continuing migrants, skill level with English tended to be lower than in the settled-out group. This is presumably partly because a migrant crew is a subculture-in-motion; there is less necessity to speak English than in a settled-out family located in an Anglo community and isolated from other Spanish speakers.

Mean length of residence of settled-out migrants in Ashocan is substantial, 16 years, which suggest that they have not settled-out purely in response to reduced employment opportunities in farm labor, a relatively recent phenomenon in Wisconsin (compare Hill 1948 with Provinzano 1971:119-20). Mean years of schooling of the voluntarily settled-out as compared to continuing migrants (3.3 yrs. more in the former group) suggests either that the more educated leave the migrant stream or that the settled-out are in a position to take greater advantage of educational opportunities present and have greater motivation to do so considering the work and social contexts which reward high school diplomas. Probably both possibilities are true. A further note is that the children of settled-out families are tending to go further in school than is the case in continuing migrant families, which is partly due to migrants' use of child labor.

Income differentials indicate clearly that self-selected or voluntarily settled-out families earn substantially more than those who continue migrating. On the other hand, the income differential between the settled-out group and all Ashocan can generally be explained on the grounds that the

settled-out group tends to be involved almost exclusively in non-managerial, blue collar laboring and related fields.

Based upon the above data, we may summarize the characteristics which separate the voluntarily settled-out migrant from the continuing migrant as follows: Settled-out families:

1. have a smaller number of children
2. have a greater facility in English
3. have more formal education, including more high school graduates
4. have substantially greater income without the child labor of farm work
5. have the willingness to sever supporting ties of kinship and friendship with other Chicanos (to go it alone) (compare with Provinzano 1971:77).

The above characteristics (especially the last) suggest that we have, in the voluntarily settled-out group, some rather Anglicized Chicanos. This type of voluntary settling-out, isolated as it is from the familiarity of a Chicano community and the support of kinsmen, generally requires that the family possess a fair skill with English, confidence that the family breadwinner can get and keep a job, relative lack of dependence on traditional supportive (kinship--friendship) ties and some sophistication at integrating oneself into the Anglo community.

The question which occurred to our research team at this point was as follows: was submergence of ethnicity necessary for comfortable adaptation to an Anglo socio/cultural context? Alternatively, was any anti-Mexican prejudice encountered in the community? Relevant to these questions, one of the student colleagues, who is a Chicano, did in-depth interviews with eleven Chicano adolescents from settled-out families. Most of these adolescents (8 of 11) had been born in Ashocan. From this investigation the

following generalizations emerged:

1. The adolescents expressed little feeling of pride in, or knowledge of, La Raza or of Mexicanness, although one parent or both had been born in Mexico in 80% of the cases.

2. There was little knowledge of the Brown Power Movement; Cesar Chavez was just a public figure to most of them.

3. Five of the eleven spoke only English. Places of birth: Ashocan 8; Texas 2; Mexico 1.

4. They seemed to be aware of discrimination on a very low and subtle level, but tended to attribute it to idiosyncracies of the individual Anglo involved, rather than a group trait of Anglos.

5. They concurred that opportunities for them were not quite what they would be for an Anglo, but seemed to feel that by hard work they could make up the relatively small inequity.

These adolescents, admittedly live in a community peripheral to main, traditional Mexican-American population centers and peripheral to Chicano activism as well. However, this does not gainsay the fact that they have carried further a process begun by their parents (who express much more awareness of discrimination in Ashocan than their children). The phenomenon described above may well be called the process of Anglicization and assimilation. It suggests that successful, dispersed settling-out into Anglo communities is possible, but only at the price of submergence of ethnicity. If the ideology of Brown Power does not penetrate Chicano consciousness in Ashocan soon, one can hypothesize attempts to "pass" as Anglos, name changing and eventual efforts to achieve a dissolution of Chicano identity, identifiability and consciousness.

This possibility may be viewed as not only inevitable, but desirable by many of those involved. If so, it will be interesting to see how far such dissolution goes and also interesting to see how the darker skinned individuals deal with color caste problems, especially as more intermarriage with Anglos is attempted. Some future experience with Brown Power may be hypothesized, the results of which may be significant, though we tend to doubt it, unless the individual migrates to an area with a high Chicano population density. This is most certainly an area for further study.

NOTE

* The process of economic and cultural absorption of migrants (farm workers and otherwise) including individuals in this category have been treated as part of a larger project focusing on Chicanos, Blacks and Anglos in Racine, Wisconsin (for example see Shannon and Morgan, 1966 and Shannon and McKin 1974).

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